

**Eötvös Loránd University**  
**Faculty of Humanities**

**DOCTORAL DISSERTATION**  
**ABSTRACT**

**Nikoletta Hendrik**  
*STATE, INDIVIDUAL AND EDUCATION IN ANCIENT PHILOSOPHY*  
*Epictetian Philosophical Education*

**Doctoral School of Philosophy**  
Head of Doctoral School: **Dr. Gábor Boros prof., DSc**

**Moral and Political Philosophy Doctoral Programme**  
**(Ethics and Political Philosophy Doctoral Programme)**  
Head of Programme: **Dr. Csaba Olay prof., PhD**

**Committee Members:**

Chair: **Dr. Csaba Olay prof., PhD**  
Referees: **Dr. István Bárány habil. adj., PhD**  
**Dr. Péter Lautner prof., CSc**  
Secretary: **Dr. Judit Szalai habil. adj., PhD**  
Member: **Dr. Gábor Kendeffy habil. doc., PhD**  
Alternates: **Dr. László Bene habil. doc., PhD**  
**Dr. Gábor Boros prof., DSc**

Supervisor:  
**Dr. Kornél Steiger prof. em., CSc**

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History offers a wide range of thoughts on the ideal human being. Werner Jaeger follows the change of the ancient ideal starting from the hero, the worker, the warrior, through the *polis*-citizen and the philosopher to the ideal Christian. From a philosophical point of view, the ideal of a rational human has key importance. It was created by Socrates in fifth century BC and which directly effected Hellenistic philosophy. Socrates stated that intellect is the distinctively human feature but it is only available as an opportunity. One needs to make steps in order to develop full rationality. All Stoics agreed with this fundamental claim, and placed rationality (*logos*) at the heart of their philosophy.

Epictetus' philosophy centers around normative rationality. The profession of a human is to be fully rational, he states, but it takes a lifetime to achieve this goal. Epictetus crafted a three-step educational programme which was intended to help his students to approximate wisdom. In the dissertation I interpret the Epictetian philosophy as a guideline to fulfill the human profession in the above described sense. The end goal is that Epictetus' student should identify himself exclusively with his own *proairesis* as that is the only thing up to him.

The key topic I examine in my dissertation is the practical aspect of the Epictetian philosophical education. The two main reasons why I chose this topic are that on one hand, Epictetus puts extreme emphasis on the practical side of education, and on the other hand, there has been no in-depth analysis of this topic since Anthony A. Long re-evaluated the importance of Epictetus in 2002. Additionally, one of the reasons Stoicism gained widespread popularity in antiquity was precisely its practical aspect.

The aim of my dissertation is to give a new interpretation of Epictetus' philosophical education starting from the theoretical foundations and following the student's practise. I analyze what Epictetus expected from his students at each *topos*, and what milestone they needed to reach in order to be allowed to enter the next *topos*. Thus my dissertation can be viewed as an analysis of the Epictetian *paideia*.

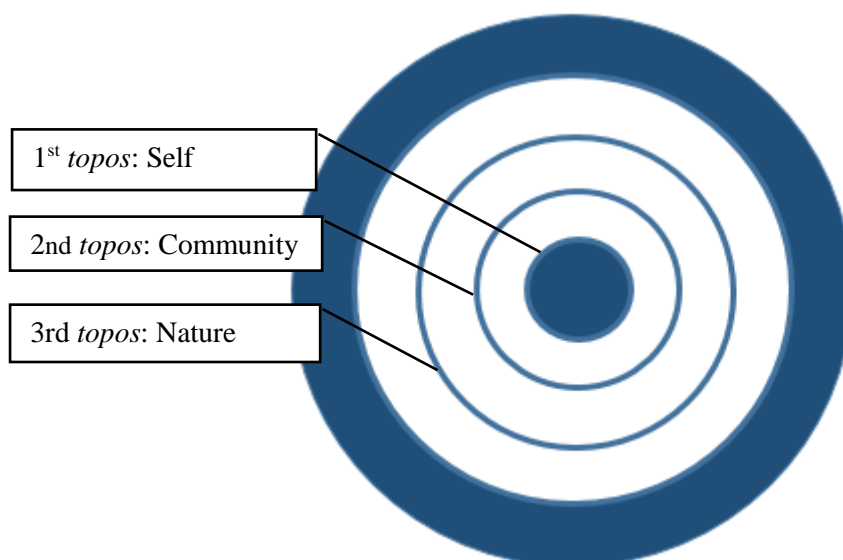
Plutarch noted that not the whole philosophy, but only the philosophical *theory* was divided into three parts by the early Stoics. I agree with his claim, and I add that Epictetus was the one who divided the philosophical *practice* into three parts. As John Sellars argued convincingly, following Pierre Hadot, to become a student of philosophy in antiquity did not mean only to learn the theory, but one needed to commit himself to philosophical practice as well. In doing

so, one decided that he would transform his character (*ēthos*) and soul (*psukhē*), which resulted in a profound change in his lifestyle (*bios*). Epictetus would have agreed with Sellars completely as he stated that it is not the theory but the practice which shows what philosophical school one follows. I take his statement seriously when I start to investigate how one became Epictetus' student and how he starts to transform himself. The contribution of my dissertation lays in the comprehensive yet detailed reconstruction of the practical aspects of the Epictetian philosophical education, which also allows me to give new insights on the theoretical aspects too.

My main thesis is that Epictetus lead his students to their selves in the first *topos*, then back into the community in the second *topos*, and into nature in the third *topos*.

ποῦ οὖν προκοπή; εἴ τις ὑμῶν ἀποστὰς τῶν ἐκτὸς ἐπὶ τὴν προαίρεσιν ἐπέστραπται τὴν αὐτοῦ, ταύτην ἐξεργάζεσθαι καὶ ἐκπονεῖν, ὥστε σύμφωνον ἀποτελέσαι τῇ φύσει, [...]. *Diss.* I. 4. 18.

Where, then, is progress (*prokopē*)? If any man among you, withdrawing from external things (*ei tis humōn apostas tōn ekstos*), has turned his attention to the question of his own moral purpose (*proairesin*), cultivating and perfecting it so as to make it finally harmonious with nature (*sunphōsnon apotelesai tē phusei*) [...]. *Diss.* I. 4. 18. Transl. Oldfather.



**Figure 1.** Main thesis of the dissertation

After the introduction, the dissertation is built in a threefold structure in accordance with the main thesis. In *Chapter 1* I analyze the notion of self in Epictetus' philosophy. I argue that the goal of the student by the end of this *topos* is that he should have the notion of the normative self, and he should be able to treat his *orexis* and *ekklisis* properly. In *Chapter 2* the community gets the main emphasis as I examine the notion of *oikeiōsis* and community participation. The student must learn by the end of the second *topos* how to fit in the community while keeping in mind that his real self is not extended to other people: it only includes his *proairesis*. In *Chapter 3* I focus on what role *logikē* plays in the third *topos*. I suggested that *logikē* makes it possible for the student to understand nature and live in accordance with it. I finish the dissertation with concluding remarks.

### Theses in Chapter 1

My main thesis in *Chapter 1* is that the self of the *prokoptōn* is different from the self of the wise, and it is also different from the self the fool. The *prokoptōn*'s self is formed dynamically inbetween the two extremes. In this chapter I take a closer look at the features of this self and the process how it is formed.

Level of Education	(a) Self = <i>Proairesis</i>	(b) Self and External Things	(c) Characteristics of Self	
			Subjective-Objective	Individual-Participative
1 <sup>st</sup> <i>topos</i>	Normative expectation	Elimination of the automatic acceptance of own <i>orexis</i>	<i>Phantasiai</i> are based on subjective ground, but their examination changes from subjective to objective.	One's own self is getting narrower, while he participates more in the community.
2 <sup>nd</sup> <i>topos</i>	Normative expectation	Elimination of identifying self with others		
3 <sup>rd</sup> <i>topos</i>	Actual reality	Elimination of identifying self with one's body		

**Table 1.** The change of the Epictetian notion of self

One's own actual self becomes identical with his *proairesis* by the end of the third *topos*. The student gets here after an exhausting and long road. In the first *topos* he eliminates the automatic acceptance of his own *orexis*. In theory he accepts that he is identical with his own *proairesis*, and not the things not up to him. It is in this sense that I claim that the first *topos*

leads the student to his real self. As the student finishes his studies in Epictetus' school, he re-enters the community, but this time he has to be aware that he has moral duties to fulfill. In the second *topos* the student eliminates the attractiveness of externals which he used to aim for in order to gain appreciation from other people. As the student approaches the third *topos*, Epictetus reminds him again that he can not postpone anymore the task of identifying himself with reason only. The last step he has to make is to stop identifying his self with his own body.

## Theses in Chapter 2

The philosophical education in Epictetus' school lasts until the end of the first *topos*. At this point he switches to self-development. By leaving the school, the student re-enters society with the freshly learned Stoic theory which already exists in him as an internalized moral standard. What he has to practise in this *topos* is how to live among his peers while focusing sharply on morally good deeds. Not only he has to realize in each situation what is *kathēkon* he has to act accordingly, but he also has to be able to execute it. Epictetus uses a double notion of community in order to help his students to find the proper acts in everyday life. He also expects different levels of commitment to the community in each *topos*. It is precisely this step-by-step approach which makes it easier for his students to successfully complete the tasks implied in the second *topos*.

Level of Education	a. Notion of Community	b. Community Participation
1 <sup>st</sup> <i>topos</i>	(-)	(-)
2 <sup>nd</sup> <i>topos</i>	(a.1) Actual <i>polis</i>	(b.1) <i>Kathēkon</i> according to <i>skhesis</i> (b.2) Possibility of taking a political role
3 <sup>rd</sup> <i>topos</i>	(a.2) <i>Cosmos</i>	(b.3) Possibility of acting for humanity

The student finishes his studies in Epictetus' school and he is back living in (a.1) the actual *polis*, where he has to act according to his (b.1) roles which are implied by his relationships. Furthermore, he has the possibility to pursue a (b.2) political career as long as his first three *personae* and his external circumstances allow him, and of course, as long as he can resist that this role drifts him away from the governance of reason. As soon as the student advanced in this field, he arrives to the level of the third *topos* where he needs to add the viewpoint of the (a.2) *cosmos* on top of his duties in the actual *polis*. At this point, as he is already advanced

philosophically as well, he has the chance to act for the whole humanity as well, if his personality allows.

My main contribution in *Chapter 2* is that I assigned the double notion of community to the three levels of community participation within Epictetus' educational programme.

### Theses in Chapter 3

The main thesis of *Chapter 3* is that the third *topos* places the student into nature. In other words, the goal of Epictetian' philosophical education becomes identical with the *telos* as it is formulated by the early Stoa, living in accordance with nature.

(a) First I identified and grouped all features of the third *topos*, and explained all of them except for the logical aspects. My methodological assumption is that the content of the third *topos* can be restored fairly well based on the texts available for us today. The third *topos* concerns the *prokoptōn* at the start, and the wise at the end of the *topos*. The third *topos* is dealing with the same subject as the previous steps, namely the correct use of one's own impressions. The additional requirement what appears at this final stage is that one should be able to have correct *phantasiai* even in mindstates which are not rational, as dreaming or drunkenness.

(b) As a second step, I intend to prove that *logikē* fits in the third *topos* in a way that it provides the student the full rational understanding of nature. First Epictetus was teaching logic as a part of the theoretical foundational phase right before the three *topoi*, but logic returns as epistemology in the final stage too. By the use of *logikē* the wise man will be able to judge whether his acts are according to nature, thus all his *kathēkon* becomes *katorthōma*.

(c) As a third step I identify two notions of nature in the formulations of the Stoic *telos*. My result is that by the end of the third *topos* the student will see his body different from his real self, as he realizes that it is the part of the *cosmos*' body. With this mindset he can treat his body just as equally indifferent as all other objects in the world. The moment the student truly internalizes this mindset, is the precise moment when he becomes wise.

(d) As a fourth step I analyze Cleanthes' prayer which is quoted four times by Epictetus in the remaining texts. I argue that Epictetus uses the prayer as a wish to live in a rational yet autonomous way. There is a high cost to autonomy however, which is that he has to accept that his body is governed entirely by *Peprōmenē*. By accepting that he has no influence over the territory of *Peprōmenē*, he actualizes the state defined by early Stoics as *euroia biu*. In this state of mind the wise man experiences all physical events undisturbed because he does not identify himself with his physical body anymore.

## Summary

Hierocles' model provided the inspiration for creating the main thesis of my dissertation. The model used the metaphor of concentric circles which symbolize one's self. The first circle stands for his body, the second for the closest family members, the third for the extended family, while the fourth for the large family. The fifth circle symbolizes the neighbours, the sixth the members of the tribe, the seventh the inhabitants of the city, the eighth the people living in neighbouring cities, while the ninth the citizens of the country. The last, tenth circle is the widest, as it stands for the whole humanity. Epictetus would criticize this model in three ways. First, he does not extend one's self to cosmic size, he keeps it intact as he identifies it only with one's own *proairesis*. To sum up the difference in the two approaches, it can be said that Epictetus practices the philosophy of elimination, while Hierocles is the philosopher of bonding. Second, Epictetus considers circles two to nine as one category, as they together form the actual *polis*. He treats only the first circle, the body, and the last circle, the whole humanity, as separate groups. Third, Epictetus does not aim for the identification with one's own body, but the independence from it.

*Topos* by *topos* the student eliminates the layers which do not belong to him in order to fully identify with rationality. The process can be interpreted as a uniquely Epictetian take on the *oikeiōsis* theory, but it might be more fitting to view it as a practical guide to develop the normative aspect of *oikeiōsis* as it was defined by early Stoics. Epictetus' main innovation was that he developed a detailed philosophical practice, he offered a fully developed Stoic *paideia* which step by step led his students closer to wisdom.